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AUTHOR Sachs, Donald H.
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ABSTRACT

It was predicted that high self-esteem subjects would have higher attraction scores than low self-esteem subjects to similar strangers or to strangers who gave positive personal evaluations. It was also predicted that high self-esteem subjects would have lower attraction scores than low self-esteem subjects to dissimilar strangers or to subjects who evaluated them negatively. Attraction was greater if the stranger was similar rather than dissimilar (p less than .001) and gave positive evaluations rather than negative ones (p less than .001). Several measures of self-esteem were used. The predicted interactions of self-esteem and attitude similarity and of self-esteem and evaluation failed to emerge for attraction. However, there was a self-esteem by similarity interaction in the predicted direction for perceived intelligence of the stranger (p less than .01). The results provide partial replication of previous research. The results were discussed in terms of the distinction between positiveness and similarity as determinants of attraction in people differing in self-esteem. It was suggested that a more molecular approach to self-esteem might be used. (Author)

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The Effects of Similarity, Evaluation, and Self-Esteem on Interpersonal Attraction

Donald H. Sachs

State University of New York, College at Geneseo

The purpose of the present study is two-fold: to clarify the construct of self-esteem, and to relate self-esteem to interpersonal attraction. Byrne (1971) has argued that scientific knowledge must expand slowly from a stable set of emperical relationships that he called the base relationship. In the study of interpersonal attraction, the base relationship is that attraction is a positive linear function of the proportion of positive reinforcers associated with the target person (Byrne, 1969, 1971). Self-esteem can be related to this base relationship by a definition and a set of ~~correlaries.~~ corollaries. The definition is that self-esteem is attraction to the self. If this is the case, 1) self-esteem should be a function of the positive reinforcers associated with the self; 2) an attitude that is similar to an attitude that a person has about himself should function as a positive reinforcer; 3) a stranger who has an attitude about a person that is similar to one that a person has about himself should be liked, and a stranger who has an attitude dissimilar to one that a person has about himself should be disliked. A positive evaluation should be a similar attitude to a person who is high in self-esteem, but a dissimilar attitude to a person who is low in self-esteem. Conversely, a negative personal evaluation should be a dissimilar attitude to a person high in self-esteem and a similar attitude to a person low in self-esteem. Since people are attracted to strangers who hold similar attitudes, the following interaction between personal evaluations and self-esteem can be predicted: there should be greater attraction to a positive evaluator from high self-esteem people than from low self-esteem people;

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and there should be greater attraction to a negative evaluator from low self-esteem people than from high self-esteem people.

The opposite interaction was predicted by Jones (1973). He argued that low self-esteem people are less secure and in greater need of positive evaluation than high self-esteem people. Therefore, low self-esteem people should respond with greater attraction to a positive evaluation and lower attraction to a negative evaluation than high self-esteem people. In his review, Jones found evidence to support both interpretations, but he noted that the issue was still unresolved.

Most previous research on self-esteem using the techniques devised by Byrne has dealt with the interactions with similarity rather than with personal evaluations. Three studies did not find any significant interaction between self-esteem and similarity on attraction (Griffitt, 1966, 1969; Hendrick & Page, 1970), whereas two recent studies did find that high self-esteem subjects were more attracted to a similar stranger and less attracted to a dissimilar stranger than low self-esteem subjects (Johnson, Gormly, & Gormly, 1973; Leonard, 1973). This interaction is based on the assumption that high self-esteem individuals are more sure of themselves than low self-esteem individuals and that therefore similarity provides greater consensual validation for their attitudes. The failure of Griffitt to obtain the interaction might be due to his use of personality rather than attitude similarity. However, other than a pilot study by Lynn Tyson at Purdue, no study has attempted to vary similarity, personal evaluation, and self-esteem in a factorial design.

The present study is an extension of the Tyson study. Basically, it is a replication of the Byrne and Rhamey (1965) study with self-esteem controlled. Consistent with Byrne and Rhamey, it is predicted that attraction will be

greater if the stranger is similar and if the stranger evaluated the subject positively. Consistent with the argument presented above, a significant self-esteem x evaluation interaction is predicted. And Consistent with the findings of Johnson, Gormly, and Gormly (1973) and Leonard (1973), a significant interaction of self-esteem and attitude similarity is also predicted.

Part of the problem in investigating self-esteem is the lack of any generally agreed upon measure of this construct (Wiley, 1961, 1968). The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Questionnaire (Coopersmith, 1967) was selected because of its extensive construct validity and because it has been used by the author elsewhere (Sachs, 1973). The Self-Esteem Questionnaire was also used independently by Johnson, Gormly, and Gormly (1973). However, since the hypothesis of the present study related interpersonal attraction to self-attraction, a Self-Evaluation Scale was also constructed. This Scale, which was modeled after the Interpersonal Judgment Scale (IJS), asked the subject to rate his own intelligence, knowledge of current events, morality, adjustment, how much he liked himself, how much he thought others would want to work with him as partners in an experiment, and how favorably he viewed himself.

METHOD

Subjects. One-hundred and nine students in an urban community college served as subjects in this experiment. Some of the subjects received course credit for participation at the discretion of their instructors.

Procedure. The procedure follows that of Byrne and Rhamey (1965). The subjects were run in small groups. In the first session, all subjects completed a 40 item Survey of Attitudes, the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Questionnaire (SEQ), adult form, and the Self-Evaluation Scale (SES).

The second session was run exactly one week after the first. The subjects were told that they were engaged in a study of interpersonal judgment. Each subject was given a Survey of Attitudes that was allegedly completed by

another student of the same sex and an IJS which allegedly was the other student's evaluation of him. The Survey of Attitudes was actually completed by the experimenter to indicate either 90% agreement or 10% agreement with the subject's attitudes. The IJS was also completed by the experimenter to indicate a positive or negative evaluation of the subject. The experimenter was blind to the self-esteem of the subject.

The subject's task was to use the IJS to indicate his best guess of the stranger's intelligence, knowledge of current events, morality, adjustment, how much he liked the stranger, how much he wanted to work with the person as partners in an experiment, how favorable he felt toward the person, how consistent the stranger was in his attitudes, and how certain he was in his judgment. Each item was on a 7 point Likert scale. The responses to the items "liking" and "working together" were summed to form an attraction score. After the subjects had completed their evaluation, they were thanked and permitted to leave.

RESULTS

Self-Esteem. The mean score on the Self-Esteem Questionnaire was 68, Standard Deviation was 16. The median score on the Self-Evaluation Scale was 16, with a range of 5 to 21. The two scales correlated $r_{(91)} = .58$.

For the purposes of analysis, the following criteria were used to define self-esteem. Low self-esteem was defined as a score below one-half Standard Deviation below the mean on the SEQ and below the median on the SES. High self-esteem was defined as a score above one-half Standard Deviation above the mean on the SEQ and above the median on the SES, provided that there was a score of 3 or less on a 10 item defensive lie scale.

Out of 109 subjects, 45 met the criterion and were included in a 2 x 2 x 2 analysis of variance for two levels each of similarity, evaluation,

and self-esteem. Each item in the IJS and the summary score for attraction was analyzed in this way. The analysis for attraction is presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

This analysis indicated that attraction was greater if the stranger had similar attitudes (F (1, 37) = 14.20, $p < .001$) and if the stranger evaluated the subject positively (F (1, 37) = 18.69, $p < .001$). No other main effects or interactions were significant, including the predicted evaluation by self-esteem interaction (F (1, 37) = 1.70, n. s.) or the similarity by self-esteem interaction (F (1, 37) = 2.04, n. s.). A similar pattern was found on all of the IJS items except morality, consistency and certainty. The attraction means for each group are presented in Table 2. There were significant interactions between similarity and evaluation for favorability toward the stranger (F (1, 37) = 8.60, $p < .01$) and the stranger's perceived knowledge of current events (F (1, 37) = 6.14, $p < .02$). The predicted interaction between self-esteem and attitude similarity emerged only for one item, perceived intelligence of the stranger (F, (1, 37) = 7.88, $p < .01$). Here, high self-esteem subjects perceived the similar stranger to be more intelligent than the dissimilar stranger, whereas the low self-esteem subjects perceived the dissimilar stranger to be more intelligent.

Insert Table 2 about here

Since 45 might be considered too small a sample, the results were further analyzed on all 102 subjects who met the defensive lie criterion. One analysis was conducted for high, medium, or low scores on the Self-Esteem

Questionnaire, whereas another was conducted for high or low scores on the Self-Evaluation Scale. These produced no new results of any sort except the following: that the evaluation by similarity interaction ceased to be significant, there was a significant main effect for Self-Esteem Questionnaire score on liking ($F(2, 90) = 5.78$, $p<.005$), and a main effect for evaluation on perceived consistency ($F(1, 94) = 8.57$, $p<.005$).

DISCUSSION

The results clearly indicate that self-esteem is not a moderator variable in the evaluation-attraction relationship. Neither the interaction predicted here nor the one predicted by Jones (1973) emerged. The results do not replicate the similarity by self-esteem interaction found by Johnson, Gormly, and Gormly (1973) and by Leonard (1973). However, they do replicate Hendrick and Page (1970), who found significant interactions of similarity and self-esteem for perceived intelligence and several other person perception items, even though they did not find the interaction for liking. The reason for these differences is not entirely clear. Although Johnson, Gormly, and Gormly used the same self-esteem scale as the present study, they used a slightly different dependent variable to measure attraction.

With regard to evaluation, one of two conclusions seems warranted: 1) there is no consistent relation between self-esteem and evaluation to affect attraction; or 2) the relatively weak effects of self-esteem on attraction are obscured by the more powerful effects of similarity and evaluation. Byrne (1971) has noted the difficulty in finding stable individual differences that relate to interpersonal attraction.

Perhaps the problem in relating self-esteem and evaluation to attraction is more conceptual than methodological. As both Byrne (1971) and Fishbein and Ajzen (1972) have pointed out, attraction is a function of the positive affect

associated with the stranger, rather than similarity per se. From this point of view, there is no necessary reason to believe that a positive evaluation is any more positive (or negative) to a person high in self-esteem than a person low in self-esteem. Furthermore, it is unlikely that self-esteem is the global self-evaluation measured by most scales. Bandura (1971) has suggested that self-esteem is the aggregate of self-reinforcements and self-nonreinforcements for meeting or failing to meet specific self-imposed criteria for specific tasks. This approach may be far too complex to be understood in terms of the proportion of positive reinforcements. It might be necessary to compare self-reinforcement versus reinforcement from others at a molecular level in order to determine under what conditions discrepancies might affect attraction. This might be done by asking subjects to evaluate their performance on some task, and then providing them with similar or dissimilar evaluations from others.

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Table I

Analysis of Variance of the Effects of Similarity, Evaluation, and Self-Esteem on Attraction

Source	Mean Square	df	F	P
Similarity (A)	104.159	1	14.199	.0009
Evaluation (B)	137.089	1	18.688	.0003
Self-Esteem (C)	.051	1	.1	
A x B	16.563	1	2.258	
A x C	14.958	1	2.039	
B x C	12.464	1	1.699	
A x B x C	.012	1	1	
Within	7.336	37	<1	

Table II

Mean Attraction Scores by

Self-Esteem, Attitude Similarity, and Evaluation

(Number in parenthesis equals n per cell)

	Evaluation			
	Positive		Negative	
	Self-Esteem		Self-Esteem	
	High	Low	High	Low
Similarity				
90% Similar	12.0 (5)	12.0 (7)	6.43 (4)	8.75 (4)
10% Similar	8.25 (7)	6.0 (4)	5.12 (8)	5.33 (6)